

## THIRTEEN

# JUDAH HALEVI

## The Book of Refutation and Proof on Behalf of the Despised Religion, or, The Kuzari

*Translated by Barry Kogan (and Lawrence Berman)*

Judah Halevi (Yehuda ben Shmuel ha-Levi, ca. 1075–1141) was likely born in Tudela on the Muslim side of the border with Castile. Until the beginning of the twentieth century he was thought to have been born in Toledo, the capital of the Christian kingdom of Castile. Indeed, he is sometimes referred to as “the Castilian” and did spend significant periods of his life in Christian territory. His life was shaped for better or for worse by living at the crossroads of the Spanish Reconquista and the Almoravid invasion of the late 1090s, and his life came to an end shortly after the Almohad invasion of the 1130s. One thing is certain: the events of Halevi’s lifetime brought home to him the special precariousness of Jewish life at this time in exile. He may have spent some of his childhood in Castile, the child of wealthy and educated Jews. In one way or another, he received a good education in Hebrew and Arabic, including all of the biblical, Talmudic, philosophic, and *kalām* learning that would serve him so well later. (His Hebrew poetry, for which he is most famous, displays the Arabic styles and conventions of the time.) Halevi traveled to the Muslim south at a relatively early age, intending to study in the Jewish center of learning in Granada. He was befriended by the famous poet Moses Ibn Ezra, after winning a competition

based on a poem by Ibn Ezra. Along the way to Granada, he spent some time in Cordova and Lucena. He may have studied with Joseph Ibn Migash in Lucena—but certainly was in contact with him. He left Granada with the Almoravid invasion (ca. 1090s). For the next twenty years, Halevi traveled, spending some time in Toledo. His renown as a poet, at a relatively early age, spread throughout Muslim and Christian Spain. In Toledo, however, he practiced medicine (and engaged in trade) and at some point married. He fathered one daughter, who is believed to have married Isaac Ibn Ezra, the son of the famous poet and biblical exegete Abraham Ibn Ezra, with whom Halevi was good friends. In 1108, Halevi’s patron Solomon Ibn Ferrizuel, a nobleman in the court of Alfonso VI of Castile, was murdered. Halevi set out on his travels, again. Over the next thirty years, he made the decision gradually to immigrate to the Land of Israel. In 1140, he traveled to Alexandria, and in 1141 to Cairo—to which his renown had spread. From Cairo, he set sail for Ashkelon or Acre. He died, under suspicious circumstances, after approximately a month in the Land of Israel, about which he had written so much poetry.

The vast majority of Halevi’s oeuvre is poetry. He is widely viewed as the greatest Hebrew poet

of the medieval period, and perhaps of all time, leaving aside the Psalms. He wrote approximately 80 love poems, 180 poems of eulogy and lamentation, 350 liturgical poems, and, perhaps his most important works, 35 poems called *Songs of Zion* and *Songs of the Sea*—the latter about the journey to Zion.

In addition to this large body of poetry, Halevi wrote one of the most important defenses of Judaism in its history. Widely known simply as the *Kuzari*, this large work is titled the *Book of Refutation and Proof on Behalf of the Despised Religion*. It is the surprising story of the conversion of the king of the Khazars (*Khazari* in Arabic, thus *Kuzari* in Hebrew) and his followers to Judaism.<sup>1</sup> (The Khazars formed a Turkic nation—or empire, as some would have it—straddling present-day Ukraine, southern Russia, and Kazakhstan.) The *Kuzari* is a dialogue between the king, a philosopher, and a sage or scholar of Judaism, a scholar of Christianity, and a scholar of Islam. Besides one of the most powerful defenses of Judaism, it contains one of the most searching critiques of philosophy in medieval literature. It also adds greater depth and complexity to the *kalām* distinction set forth by Saadya. Like Saadya, Halevi distinguishes between intellectual (or rational) and revealed laws; however, his account of intellectual laws (or *nomoi*) alludes to at least three different types of law:<sup>2</sup> (1) the intellectual laws of the philosophers, (2) those of the pagans or Sabians (e.g., 1:81), and (3) those of the *mutakallimūn* (e.g., 2:48, 3:7, 3:11). Type 1 can also be subdivided into (a) the governance of the solitary (e.g., 1:1) and (b) the laws established by philosophers such as Plato in his *Laws* (cf. 1:81 below). And because Halevi refers primarily to pagan philosophers, there can be overlap between type 1b and type 2. The reader should attend to Halevi's obvious rejection of type 1a, and his almost equally obvious embrace of type 3. He reveals his allegiance to the rational law tradition of Saadya in expressing and attempting to justify these preferences.

The *Kuzari* is a dialogue in five parts. As a dialogue rather than a treatise, its contents are difficult to summarize. Treatise<sup>3</sup> 1 presents the Khazar king's search for the way of life containing fitting (religious) actions. (It is one of the author's conceits that the king has already been assured through a prophetic dream that his intentions are good; it is his actions that are wanting.) The bulk of the conversation consists in the Jewish scholar or sage's efforts to defend the despised religion. Treatise 2 opens with the king eager to convert to Judaism. It contains discussions of the names of God, the election of the Land of Israel and of the People Israel, in opposition to the king's penchant for more ascetic, otherworldly actions. Treatise 3 develops the portrait of the exemplary Jew, at least of the day, as the "guardian of the city." At once, the scholar opposes the asceticism of the Qaraites (a sect that rejected the Oral Law or Talmud and adopted literalism in the interpretation of the Bible), as well as of the other monotheistic religions, and defends the value of the rabbinic tradition. Treatise 4 takes up the names of God once more and attempts to plumb the depths of the link between the mysterious God of Abraham and the prophets (as opposed to the God of the philosophers) with the aid of the mystical work the *Book of Creation* (on which Saadya wrote a commentary). Treatise 5 is devoted to *kalām* arguments in defense of the religion, against the philosophers.

The first modern edition of the *Kuzari* was Hartwig Hirschfeld's *Das Buch al-Chazari, im arabischen Urtext, sowie in der hebräischen Übersetzung* (Leipzig, 1887). Barry Kogan (and the late Lawrence V. Berman) have translated the *Kuzari* from the critical Judeo-Arabic<sup>4</sup> edition by D. H. Baneth and H. Ben-Shammai: *Kitāb al-radd wa-al-dalīl fī al-dīn al-dhalīl* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977). The following are excerpts from their translation, which is forthcoming in the Yale Judaica Series. The page numbers in brackets refer to the Hirschfeld edition.

1. For information on the historical reality of the Jewish Khazars, the interested reader should see Kevin Alan Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

2. For a detailed tracking of these types of law, the reader should see Leo Strauss, "The Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*," in *Persecution of the Art of Writing* (1952; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 95–141.

3. The term "Treatise" (*ma'amar*) for the parts of the *Kuzari* was inserted by the editors, Baneth and Ben-Shammai. It is a standard term, like "book" and "chapter," that has no bearing on the character of the *Kuzari* as a dialogue rather than a treatise.

4. Aside from some minor differences in grammar, Judeo-Arabic is Arabic written in Hebrew characters.

## TREATISE ONE

(1:1) I was asked about whatever argumentation I had against those who differ with us, such as the philosophers and the adherents of the religions, as well as the dissenters<sup>5</sup> who differ with the multitude [of Jews]; and I recalled what I had heard of the arguments of the sage, who was with the king of the Khazars when the latter adopted the religion of the Jews some 400 years ago today according to the testimony mentioned in the “Book of Histories.”

A dream came to him repeatedly as though an angel were addressing him, saying, “Your intention is pleasing to God, but your actions are not.” Now he used to be very diligent with regard to the worship prescribed by the Khazar religion to the extent that he himself used to officiate at the temple-service and the sacrifices with pure and sincere intent. Nevertheless, each time he exerted himself diligently with regard to those acts, the angel came to him at night, telling him, “Your intention is pleasing, but your actions are not.” This prompted him to investigate the various religions and sects, and ultimately both he and the multitude of the Khazars became Jews. Some of the arguments of the sage seemed persuasive to me and in agreement with my own belief. Accordingly, I thought that I should record [2] this argumentation just as it took place, *and the intelligent will understand* [Dan. 12:10].

It has been reported that when the king of the Khazars realized in his dream that his intention was pleasing to God but his actions were not pleasing, and [when he further realized] in his sleep that He was commanding him to seek out those actions that are pleasing to God, he asked a philosopher about the latter’s belief.

The philosopher said to him: Not so! There is no “being pleased” and no “feeling hatred” on the part of God, because He, may He be exalted, is beyond desires and aims. The reason is that [having] an aim indicates there is a deficiency in the one who has it, while achieving one’s aim is a perfection for him [who does so]; but as long as it remains unfulfilled, it is a deficiency. Likewise, according to the philosophers, He is beyond [4] the knowledge of particulars because they change with the times, whereas there is no change in God’s knowledge. Therefore, He is not aware of you, let alone of your

intentions and your actions, nor does He hear your prayers or observe your movements.

Indeed, even though the philosophers say that He created you, this is meant only metaphorically because He is the cause of [all the] causes involved in the creation of every created thing, not because this [creation] was intended on His part. In fact, He did not create man at all because the world is eternal; and man has never ceased coming into being out of a man before him. Combined within him there are forms, natural dispositions, and character traits coming from his father, his mother, and his relatives, as well as qualities deriving from the different climates, lands, foods, and waters, interacting with the influences of the celestial spheres, the planets, and the signs of the zodiac, through the various relations that come about because of them.<sup>6</sup> Everything goes back to the First Cause, not because of an aim that it has, but rather [because of] an emanation from which a second cause emanated, then a third, and then a fourth set of causes. These causes and their effects are necessarily connected to one another and have become part of a [continuous] chain, just as you see them. Their necessary connection is eternal, just as the First Cause is eternal, it has no beginning.

Now every single individual in this world has causes by means of which it can be made complete. Thus, an individual whose causes are perfect becomes perfect, while an individual whose causes are deficient becomes deficient, like the Ethiopian who is capable of receiving no more than the form of a man and whose reasoning capacity is at the most deficient level possible. But the philosopher is someone who is provided with dispositions by means of which he receives the natural, moral, intellectual, and practical virtues, and does not lack anything pertaining to perfection. These perfections, however, are [at first only] potential, and they need both instruction and training in order to bring them to actuality. Only then will the individual aptitudes with which he was provided become manifest as, for instance, a perfection, a deficiency, or as [one of] an infinite variety of intermediate states.

Accordingly, a light belonging to the divine hierarchy, called the Active Intellect will attach itself

5. The Qaraites.

6. Cf. Alfarabi *Political Regime* secs. 65–67 (above, selection 3).

to the perfect individual, and his passive intellect will attach itself to that light with such a unifying attachment that the individual will think that he is that Active Intellect, with there being no difference between the two of them. His organs, I mean, the limbs of that individual, will be used only in performing the most perfect actions, at the most appropriate times, and in accordance with the very best conditions, as if they were organs of the Active Intellect itself and not of the material, passive intellect, which used to employ them before, sometimes rightly, but more often wrongly. The former always does so in the right way.

This degree is the ultimate end for which the perfect individual hopes after his soul has been purified of doubts and acquired mastery [6] of the sciences according to their true character, so that it may come to be like an angel. It thus attains the lowest level of the divine kingdom, which is separate from bodies. This is the level of the Active Intellect, an angel whose rank is just below that of the angel which is in charge of the sphere of the moon. They are both intellects devoid of the various kinds of matter and coeternal with the First Cause. They do not fear extinction—ever. Thus, the soul of the perfect man and that [Active] Intellect become one and the same thing. He is not concerned about the extinction of his body and his organs because he and that [Active Intellect] have become one and the same thing. His soul delights in life because he becomes a part of the group consisting of Hermes, Asclepius, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. In fact, he and they, and everyone who is at their level [of perfection], and the Active Intellect are one and the same thing. This, then, is what is called “God’s being pleased,” speaking symbolically or by way of approximation.<sup>7</sup>

Pursue it, therefore, and pursue knowledge of the true realities of things so that your intellect may become active and not passive. Keep to the way that is most just with regard to both character traits and actions because it helps one to conceive that which is true, to persevere in study, and to resemble that same Active Intellect. Contentment, modesty, and submissiveness, and every virtuous character trait will follow this, together with reverence for the First Cause, not in order to have it grant you its favor or to spare you its wrath, but in order for you to resemble the Active Intellect by preferring truth [over falsehood],

describing every thing as it should be described, and believing it to be as it really is.

These are some of the attributes of the intellect. Once you can be described by this kind of belief, you will (1) not be concerned about what kind of Law you observe or profess or revere, or what kind of speech, language, or actions [you employ to do so]; or else, (2) create a religion for yourself for the sake of [cultivating] submissiveness, reverence, and praise, and also for governing your character traits, your home, and your city, if you are accepted by them; or, finally, (3) adopt the intellectual *nomoi* composed by the philosophers as your religion. Make the purification of your soul your purpose and your aim, and, in general, seek out the purification of your heart in any way that is possible for you, after first acquiring knowledge of the universals belonging to the sciences in accordance with their true character. Then you will achieve your goal, I mean, attachment to that spiritual entity, that is, the Active Intellect. Perhaps it will inform you and also command you through knowledge of hidden things conveyed by way of veridical dreams and images that are “right on the mark.”

(1:2) The Khazar said to him: Your statement is certainly persuasive, but it’s not in keeping with my request because I know by myself that I am pure [in my] soul and direct [my] actions [8] towards pleasing the Lord. Nevertheless, I was told that these actions are not pleasing, even though the intention is pleasing. Undoubtedly, therefore, there are certain actions that are pleasing in themselves and not dependent on mere opinions. Otherwise, [consider the fact] that the Christian and the Muslim, who have divided up the whole world between themselves, wage war against one another, although each of them has already directed his intention sincerely towards [pleasing] God. Each has taken up the monastic life; each has practiced asceticism; and each has fasted and prayed. Yet each has gone off determined to kill his counterpart, believing that the greatest good and [the best way to achieve] closeness to God lies in killing the other. And so, they are both killed, while each of them believes that his journey leads to the Garden [of Eden] and Paradise. But it is rationally impossible for both of them to be right.

(1:3) The philosopher said: There is no [call to] kill [either] one of these people according to the

7. Cf. Alfarabi, *Political Regime* sec. 85 (above, selection 3).

religion of the philosophers, since they follow the intellect.

(1:4) The Khazar said: What source of confusion could be greater, according to the philosophers, than the [Christian's and the Muslim's] belief in complete innovation—that the world was created in six days and that the First Cause speaks to individual human beings? Not only that, [there is the problem of God's] being beyond the knowledge of particulars, which the philosophers have declared regarding Him. Nevertheless, on the strength of the philosophers' actions, their [knowledge of the] sciences, their investigation [of the truth], and their personal efforts [to attain it], prophecy should have been well-known and widespread among them, owing to their attachment to spiritual things; and they should be described as having performed extraordinary feats, miracles, and wonders as well. But, in fact, we sometimes see veridical dreams come to someone who has not been concerned with science nor with the purification of his soul, while we find the very opposite of this in the case of those who have sought it. This proves that the divine order [of things] as well as the souls [of certain human beings] have a secret character other than what you have mentioned, O philosopher.

Then the Khazar said to himself: I will ask the Christians and the Muslims, for undoubtedly one of the two types of [religious] practice [they follow] is the one that is pleasing. As for the Jews, well, what is obvious from their despicable condition, paltry numbers, and everyone's loathing for them is quite sufficient [for me to ignore them]. Therefore, he invited a certain Christian scholar and asked him about his knowledge and his actions.



(1:10) The Khazar said: Yes, of course. It seems that I am forced to ask the Jews because they are the remnant of the children of Israel. For I now realize that they themselves are the proof that God has a Law on earth. He then summoned one of the sages of the Jews and asked him about his belief.

(1:11) Accordingly, [the Jewish sage] said to him: I have faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, who brought the children of Israel out of Egypt with signs and miracles, provided for

them in the wilderness, and gave them the land of [Canaan] after they had crossed the sea and the Jordan miraculously. He sent Moses with His Law, and then thousands of prophets after him to support His Law by means of promises [of reward] to whoever observed it and threats [of punishment] to whoever disobeyed it. Our faith pertains to all that was included in the Torah, but the story is long.

(1:12) The Khazar said: I had originally decided not to ask a Jew because I knew about the destruction of their traditions and the inferiority of their opinions, since their misfortune has not left them anything worth praising. Why, then, didn't you say, O Jew, that you have faith in the Creator of the world, who orders it and governs it, and in Him who created you and provided for you, and [use] similar such descriptions, which constitute proof for everyone who has a religion? Because of descriptions like these, people pursue truth and justice in order to imitate the Creator with reference to His wisdom and justice. [16]

(1:13) The [Jewish] sage said: What you are referring to is the syllogistic, governmental religion to which speculation leads, but it contains many doubtful points. Ask the philosophers about it, and you will not find them agreeing on a single action or a single belief because they are [merely] claims. Some of them, they can demonstrate. Some of them, they can support persuasively; but some of them they cannot even support persuasively, let alone establish by demonstration.

(1:14) The Khazar said: I think your speech now, O Jew, is more likely [to persuade me] than the opening part of it was before, and I would like additional proof.

(1:15) The sage said: On the contrary, the opening part of my speech is the demonstration. What is more, it is [based on] direct observation (*al-'iyān*)<sup>8</sup> and doesn't need proof and demonstration.



(1:31) The [Jewish] sage said: [It is] by virtue of the natural order, [that] nourishment, growth, procreation, as well as their various powers and all the conditions pertaining to them, become necessary. In that respect, plants and animals are distinguished from earth, stones, minerals, and elements.

8. Literally, "eyewitness." Compare 2:48 below: "direct experience" for *al-'iyān al-mushāhada*.

(1:32) The Khazar said: This is a generalization which needs to be worked out in detail, but it is true. [20]

(1:33) The sage said: [It is] by means of the psychic order [that] all animals are distinguished; and movements, volitions, character traits, external and internal senses, and so forth necessarily follow from it.

(1:34) The Khazar said: This, too, cannot be rejected.

(1:35) The sage said: [It is] by means of the intellectual order [that] the rational [animal] is distinguished from all of the [other] animals. Moreover, the improvement of [people's] character traits, and then the improvement of the household, and then, finally the improvement of the city necessarily follows from it. And, [thus,] political regimes and political nomoi come into being.

(1:36) The Khazar said: This too is true.

(1:37) The sage said: Then what level is above this one?

(1:38) The Khazar said: The level of the great men of knowledge.

(1:39) [The sage said]: I had in mind [here] nothing other than a level that distinguishes its representatives by means of an essential difference, in the same way that plants are distinguished from inanimate things, and man is distinguished from beasts. However, differences of more and less are infinite, since they are merely accidental differences and are not really [different] levels.

(1:40) The Khazar said: In that case, then, there is no level beyond man among the various beings that can be perceived by the senses.

(1:41) The sage said: Well, then, if we should find a man who enters fire without its harming him, who goes without food for a long period without feeling hunger, whose face has a radiance that [people's] eyes cannot bear [to gaze upon], who does not fall ill or become senile and worn

out, so that when he has reached his [allotted] life span, he dies a death freely chosen like someone who climbs into his bed to sleep on a certain day and at a certain hour, in addition to knowing hidden things about what has been and what will be, wouldn't this be the level that is essentially different from the level of ordinary people?

(1:42) The Khazar said: Even more! This level would be characteristic of the divine kingdom, if it exists; and this [kind of] person would come under the dominion of the divine order and not of the intellectual, the psychic, or the natural order.



(1:80) The Khazar said: Let's go back to our original aim. Tell me how your religion developed and then how it spread and came to be viewed, how concord emerged after discord, and how much time it took for your religion to become well established and built-up, until it was [fully] constructed and complete. For undoubtedly the beginnings of religious communities are to be found in individuals who help one another in supporting the opinion that God wishes to prevail. And so they keep on growing in numbers and [eventually] achieve victory by themselves or a victorious king arises on their behalf, who forces the multitude to accept that opinion.

(1:81) The sage said: Only the intellectual nomoi, which have their origin in man, arise and develop in this way. When [a man who frames such laws] appears on the scene and meets with success, it is said that he is "supported by God," "inspired," and other things of this kind. But the nomos that has its origin in God arises only suddenly. It was told: "Be!" and it came into being, just like the creation of the world.

(1:82) The Khazar said: Truly, you have left us awestruck, O sage!



## [68] TREATISE TWO

(2:1) Subsequently, all that is reported in the history of the Khazars about the matter of the Khazar king took place: In the mountains of Warsan, he revealed the secret of his dream to his vizier, the very dream that came to him repeatedly, to the effect that he should seek out those actions that are pleasing to God, exalted be He. So, both of them, the king and his vizier, set out on foot together for the

uninhabited mountains by the sea. [It then tells of] how they happened upon a certain cave during the night in which a group of Jews used to rest every Sabbath, how they disclosed themselves to them, converted to their religion, and were circumcised in that very cave. The two of them then returned to their country, resolute in the religion of the Jews, yet concealing the secret of their belief until they

cautiously revealed the secret little by little to several groups among their upper classes. Eventually, they grew numerous and made public what they had kept secret. Moreover, they prevailed over the rest of the Khazars, and converted them to the religion of the Jews as well. They sent for scholars and books from various countries, and they studied the Torah.

[Next, we learn about] their noble conduct as well as their triumph over their enemies, their conquest of the countries [adjacent to them], the treasures that were disclosed to them, how their troops ultimately came to be a great multitude, amounting to hundreds of thousands, in conjunction with their love for the religion and their longing for the Temple—to the extent that they set up a replica of the Tabernacle that Moses (peace be upon him) had set up, how they honored those who were native-born members of the children of Israel, and asked to be blessed [by them], in keeping with all that has been mentioned in their history. Now when the king studied the Torah and the books of the prophets, he took that same sage as his teacher and began to ask him Hebraic questions. The first thing he asked him about was the names and attributes that are ascribed to God and what appears to be implied by some of them with respect to corporeality, despite the absurdity of that [notion] according to the intellect. Similarly, the Law also dismisses it in the clearest terms. [70]



(2:46) The [Jewish] sage said: Sometimes, your forgetfulness about the roots [of faith] that I set out for you and which you yourself granted really pains me. Didn't we agree that one draws near to God only by means of actions commanded by God? Do you think that such drawing near is simply a matter of being submissive and abasing oneself and whatever else follows along the same lines?

(2:47) The Khazar said: Yes, with justice, that is exactly what I think. I have read it in your books, just as it was taught: *What does the Lord (YHVH), your God demand of you? Only this: To revere the Lord your God*, and so on [Deut. 10:12], and *what the Lord requires of you* [Micah 6:8], and there are many other passages besides those.

(2:48) The sage said: These and similar such things are the intellectual *nomoi* (*al-nawāmīs al-‘aqliyya*). They are the preparation and preamble to the divine Law (*al-sharī‘a al-ilāhiyya*) and precede it both in nature and in time. They are

indispensable for governing any group of human beings, no matter what it might be, so that even a band of robbers cannot avoid adhering to justice in what is between them. Otherwise, their association would not last. Now when Israel's rebelliousness got to [108] the point that they disregarded even the intellectual [and] governmental Laws (*al-sharā‘i‘ al-‘aqliyya wa-al-siyāsiyya*), which are as indispensable [for every group as certain natural things are indispensable] for every individual, such as eating and drinking, moving and resting, and sleeping and being awake, but nevertheless held fast to the acts of worship pertaining to the sacrifices and the other divine and traditional Laws (*al-sharā‘i‘ al-ilāhiyya wa-al-sam‘iyya*), He became satisfied with less from them. Hence, they were told: If only you kept the Laws that even the least and lowest groups accept as obligatory, such as adhering to justice and the good and also acknowledging God's bounty! For the divine Law can be fulfilled completely only after perfect adherence to the governmental and intellectual Law [has been achieved]; and included within the intellectual Law is both adhering to justice and acknowledging God's bounty.

Accordingly, how is it [acceptable] for someone who neglects this to offer sacrifices and to observe the Sabbath, circumcision, and other things of that sort that the intellect neither requires nor rejects? They are the Laws by means of which *Israel* was singled out, [constituting] an addition to the intellectual ones, and by means of which the bounty of the divine order reached them. But they did not know how these Laws became obligatory, just as they did not know how it happened that the *glory of the Lord (YHVH)* descended among them, how the *fire of the Lord* consumes their sacrifices, how they heard the Lord's address to them, and how everything that happened to them took place with respect to those things that [people's] intellects can[not] concede as possible"—were it not for direct experience (*al-‘iyān al-mushāhada*) and the personally attested spectacle [they saw], which cannot be rejected. Thus, it was because of a situation like this that they were told: *what the Lord requires of you* [Micah 6:8], and *Add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices* [Jer. 7:21], and other things like these. Is it possible for the Israelite [addressed in this way] to confine himself to *doing justice and loving mercy* [Micah 6:8], while treating *circumcision*, the Sabbath, and the rest of the commandments as superfluous, and then prosper?

(2:49) The Khazar said: Not according to what you set forth earlier. He only becomes a virtuous man, according to the opinion of the philosophers, and he doesn't care about which way he takes to draw near [to God], whether by becoming a Jew, a Christian, or something else, or by [following] whatever he invents for himself. But now we've gone back to using intellectual speculation, syllogistic reasoning, and independent judgment, whereby all men get into situations in which they strive to be in accord with the Law because their own reasoning has led them to it; and this is absurd.

(2:50) The sage said: The divine Law does not make us worship through asceticism, but rather through moderation and giving each of the faculties of the soul and the body its due with justice, without giving in to excess, because giving in to excess with regard to one faculty is tantamount to taking away from another. Thus, whoever inclines toward the faculty of lust becomes deficient with regard to the faculty of thought, and vice versa.<sup>9</sup> Again, whoever inclines toward gaining mastery over others becomes deficient with regard to some other faculty. Therefore, prolonged fasting is not [an act of] worship for someone whose appetites are weak, [110] who discards them and is therefore physically feeble. On the contrary, here, living in ease and comfort, would be an appropriate counterpoise and precaution [against this]. Neither is being excessively frugal with money [an act of] worship, if it happened to be acquired lawfully, easily, and without distracting one from learning and good works, especially for someone who has a family and children and is well-disposed to making charitable contributions that would please God. On the contrary, increasing [his contributions] is more appropriate for him. In general, our Law is divided [equally] between *fear*, *love*, and *joy*. You may draw near to your Lord through each of them. Accordingly, your submission on fast days [brings you] no closer to God than your joy on *Sabbaths and festivals*, if your joy arises from thought and intention.

Now, just as the *prayers of supplication* require thought and intention, so, too, does joy in His order and His Law require thought and intention, so that you may rejoice in the Law itself out of love for its Giver. Moreover, you will see how He has shown [His] preference for you by means of it. It is as though you were one of His guests, invited to

enjoy His table and His favors, for which you give thanks both inwardly and outwardly. If emotion wells up within you to the point of singing and dancing because of your joy, especially [joy] in the Law, then that singing and dancing are [expressions of genuine] worship and a bond between you and the divine order. Moreover, our Law has not left these matters unaddressed, either. On the contrary, they are regulated precisely, since it is not within the capacity of human beings to determine exactly those things that benefit the faculties of [people's] souls and bodies, nor to establish what [proportion of] rest and exercise is right for us, nor to calculate what the land will produce so that it may be left fallow during the *seventh year* and the *jubilee year*, while still contributing the obligatory tithe, and other things besides that from it.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, He ordained the idleness that pertains to the Sabbath, the festivals, and the land. All of this is a *remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt* and a *remembrance of the Work of Creation*, for these two things are linked to each other by the divine will alone [and] not by chance or by nature, just as He, exalted be He, said: *You have but to inquire about bygone ages...*, and so on [Deut. 4:32]; *Has any people ever heard the voice of God...*, and so on [Deut. 4:33]; *Or has any God ventured...*, and so on [Deut. 4:34].

Thus, observance of the Sabbath is in itself the [ultimate] acknowledgment of divine sovereignty. However, it is an acknowledgment, as it were, in the language of deeds because whoever believes that there was rest on the Sabbath from the *Work of Creation* has already acknowledged the [world's having come into being as a] complete innovation without any doubt. And if he acknowledges the [world's having come into being as a] complete innovation, he also acknowledges the One who brings about this complete innovation, the Artisan, exalted be He. But, whoever does not believe it has fallen into doubts [associated with belief in the] eternity of the world, and his belief with regard to the Creator of the world, exalted be He, is also not pure. Hence, observance of the obligations of the Sabbath is closer to God than worship [in general], asceticism, and pious isolation.

Consider how the divine order, which was connected with Abraham, and then with a multitude of his choicest [offspring], [112] and then with the Holy Land, began to lead the nation step by step, to preserve its progeny so that no one would

9. Cf. Saadya Gaon *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* chap. 10.

10. Cf. Maimonides *Guide* 3.26 (below, selection 15).

be left abandoned, and to place them in the most secure, the most agreeable, and the most fertile place, causing them to grow miraculously until He moved them and planted them in the soil that was most suitable for the choicest [offspring of Adam] [Jer. 2:4–7, 22]. Accordingly, it was called *the God of Abraham* [Ps. 47:10; 2 Kings 17:26–27; Gen. 24:3; Zeph. 2:11] and *the God of the land* [2 Kings 17:26–27], just as it was called [*He who is enthroned on the cherubim*] [1 Sam. 4:4], *He who dwells in Zion* [Ps. 123:1], and *He who dwells in Jerusalem* [Ps. 135:21], making these places analogous to the heavens, as it is said: *Enthroned in heaven* [Ps. 123:1]. Now because the strength of His light in these places is just like the manifestation of His light in the heavens, but is mediated by [a people] worthy of receiving that light, He causes it to pour forth over them, and that which comes from Him is called *love*. This is what has been set

down in writing for us and also enjoined upon us to believe, to praise, and to be thankful for in [the prayer that begins] “With everlasting love You have loved us...”<sup>11</sup> so that we might think of the beginning [of these things as being] from Him, not from ourselves, just as we say with respect to the creation of animals, for example, that they did not create themselves. Rather, God fashioned them and brought them to perfection because He saw matter well suited to that form. Similarly, He, exalted be He, is the One who promptly set out and began bringing us out of Egypt in order for us to become His army and for Him to become our King, just as He said: *I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God* [Num. 15:41; Lev. 22:33]. Even more, He spoke also of *Israel, in whom I glory* [Isa. 49:3].



### TREATISE THREE

(3:1) The sage said: Among us, the distinguishing mark of the worshiper does not consist in being detached from this world, lest he become a burden to it and it become a burden to him; for he would hate his life, which is one of God’s favors to him. By means of it, He bestows benefits upon him, just as it says: *I will let you enjoy the full count of your days* [Exod. 23:26]; *And you will have a long life* [Deut. 22:7]. Rather, he loves this world and long life too because they enable him to earn the hereafter; and everything which increases goodness contributes to [reaching] a higher level in the hereafter. Of course, he would love to be at the level of *Enoch*, of whom it was said: *Enoch walked [with God]* [Gen. 5:24], or at the level of *Elijah* [2 Kings 2:11], to be free enough to seclude himself for the company of the angels; for he would not feel lonely during solitude and seclusion. On the contrary, they would be his companions, while in the crowd he would feel lonely due to his being deprived of witnessing the kingdom of heaven, [the experience of] which enables him to dispense with food and drink. For people such as these, complete seclusion is appropriate. Indeed, they

desire death because they have reached the ultimate limit, beyond which there is no additional level one could hope for.

Now, the learned who philosophize also desire seclusion so that their thoughts might become clear in order to draw sound conclusions from their syllogistic reasonings, to achieve certainty for themselves regarding whatever doubts they might still have. Along with this, they want to meet students who will urge them on to investigation and recollection, just like someone with a burning desire to amass wealth, who loathes being engaged otherwise than with someone who will do business with him so that he might reap a profit together with him. This is the level of Socrates and those who are like him. But these are singular individuals. There is no hope of attaining their level today.

Of course, in the presence of the *Divine Presence*, within the Holy Land, among that nation which is naturally disposed towards prophecy, there were people who would engage in ascetic practices and live in uninhabited regions, joining with those like them, and, in general, not

11. Cf. *Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot* 11b and the second benediction of the *Shema* and its blessings for the morning service, Daily Prayer Book.

isolating themselves. On the contrary, they would assist one another in [studying] the sciences of the Law and its actions, which bring one closer to that [142] level *in holiness and purity*. They were *the prophetic bands*. However, at this time, in this place, and amidst this people, when *prophecy is not widespread* [1 Sam. 3:1], given the scarcity of that knowledge which is acquired and the absence of that knowledge which is innate, whoever makes himself live in a state of isolation by means of ascetic practices has put himself through both psychological and physical pain and illness. The humbling effects characteristic of those illnesses are evident in him, though it is thought that he has humbled himself through his submissiveness and obedience. He becomes a prisoner, denying life, weary of both his prison and his pains, and finding no pleasure in his seclusion. And how could this be otherwise, when he has neither come into contact with divine light, which would keep him company, like the prophets, nor acquired sciences that would suffice to occupy and delight him for the rest of his life, like the philosophers?

Grant that he is pious [and] superior, a person who loves confiding in his Lord in seclusion, rising, praying, and supplicating through whatever he may remember of *supplications* and *petitions*. However, these innovations are satisfying only on the days when they are fresh. The more they are recited over and over by the tongue, the less the soul is affected by them; nor does it experience grief or mercy because of them. Thus, night and day pass by and his soul makes its demands on him through its natural faculties of seeing, hearing, speaking, moving about at will, eating, drinking, copulating, making a profit, caring for family, sharing with those who are weak, and supporting the Law when he sees it wanting. Will he not remain caught and entangled, regretting all that he has tied his soul to, and by his very regretfulness, increasing his distance from the divine order to which he [originally] wished to come close?

(3:2) The Khazar said: Then describe for me the actions of a superior person among you today.

(3:3) The sage said: The superior person is the guardian of his city, acting justly and assigning its people their daily provisions and everything they need. He treats them fairly inasmuch as he does not cheat any of them nor give anyone more than he deserves. Subsequently, when he needs them, he will find them obedient and immediately responsive to his call. He commands them, and they carry out the command. He forbids them, and they desist.

(3:4) The Khazar said: I asked you about a superior person, not about a ruler.

(3:5) The sage said: The superior person is someone who is a ruler, someone obeyed by his senses as well as his psychic and bodily faculties. He governs them by a political governance, just as it is said: *And [it is better] to have self-control than to conquer a city* [Prov. 16:32]. He is the one who is [truly] fit for rule because if [144] he were to lead a city, he would deal justly with it, in the same way that he deals justly with his body and his soul. For he has subdued his appetitive faculties and prevented them from becoming excessive after giving them their rightful share and providing them with whatever will remedy their deficiencies, through food in moderation, drink in moderation, bathing, and pursuing a livelihood in moderation too. He has also subdued his spirited faculties, which demand a show of victory, after giving them their rightful portion and providing them with a stake in that victory which is useful, such as debates about the sciences and ideas, and also in rebuking malicious people.

Moreover, he has also given his senses their rightful share in whatever redounds to his benefit, so that he directs his hands, feet, and tongue towards that which is necessary and the most useful choice—likewise for hearing and seeing and the common sense, which follow them; then, for imagination, estimation, cogitation, and memory; and then the faculty of volition which gives directions to all of these. Moreover, it also takes direction, being subservient to the free choice of the intellect.

Now, he does not neglect even one of these limbs and faculties with regard to whatever concerns it alone, lest it damage the rest. When he has satisfied the need that each of them has and given them a sufficient amount of rest and sleep, and also given the vital faculties all that sustains them with respect to wakefulness and movement in regard to the activities of this world, he then calls upon his “community.” Just as the ruler who is obeyed calls upon his troops, who are obedient to whatever he has in mind, to attach themselves to that level which is above them [all], I mean, the divine level, which is above the intellectual level.

Thus, he arranges his “community” hierarchically and organizes it, imitating the way in which *Moses, our Master, peace be upon him*, arranged his community hierarchically around *Mount Sinai*. He commands the faculty of volition to be receptive and obedient to whatever order comes from him so that it will follow him

immediately and thus employ the other faculties and limbs in accordance with whatever he orders without disagreement. He also commands it not to pay attention to the demons of the estimative and imaginative [faculties], and neither to accept them nor assent to them until it consults with the intellect. If it approves of what they both think, [the voluntary faculty] accepts it; but if not, it rebels against them both. Thus, the voluntary [faculty] accepts that [judgment] by [the intellect] and resolves to follow it. Then it guides the organs of cogitation and frees it from all prior mundane thoughts. It assigns the imaginative [faculty] the task of presenting the most splendid representations of existing things that it has, with the aid of memory, so that it may thereby imitate the divine order, which is being sought, such as, for example, the *gathering of Mount Sinai* [Exod. 19–20; Deut. 4:9–5:28], and the *gathering of Abraham and Isaac at Mount Moriah* [Gen. 22:11–18], and also *the Tabernacle of Moses (peace be upon him) the order of the service* [Exod. 25:1–9], the indwelling of the *glory* within the *Temple*, and [146] much else besides. He orders the retentive [faculty] to hold that in trust and not to forget it. Moreover, he prevents the estimative [faculty] and its demons from making the truth seem unclear and doubtful. He also prevents the spirited and appetitive [faculties] from prejudicing and corrupting the voluntary [faculty] and causing it to be preoccupied with whatever anger and desire lie within themselves.

After this preliminary step, the voluntary faculty rouses all of the limbs that are employed by it with ardor, eagerness, and joy, so that they stand when it is time to stand, without becoming sluggish; they prostrate themselves when it orders them to prostrate themselves; and they sit down when it is time to be seated. Eyes are fixed, like those of a servant, on his master [Ps. 123:2]. Both hands stop their fidgeting, and the one does not touch the other. Both feet become straight for the purpose of standing up, and all of his limbs are at attention, as though amazed and anxious, to obey their ruler. It does not concern them that pain or fatigue may be involved in doing so. The tongue fully conforms to the thought so as not to go beyond it. But neither does he speak during prayer in a rote or mechanical way, like the starling and the parrot. On the contrary, there is both thought

and reflection in every word so that his hour [at prayer] becomes the choicest part of his time as well as its “fruit,” while the rest of his hours become like pathways that lead to that one. He longs for its approach because during that time he resembles those beings that are spiritual and is remote from those that are bestial. Thus, the fruit of his day and his night becomes those three times of prayer, and their fruit is the Sabbath day because it is reserved for entering into contact with the divine order [Gen. 2:3] and worshipping it with *joy*, not with submissiveness, as has been explained.

The regular provision of this in relation to the soul is like the regular provision of nourishment in relation to the body. Thus, one prays for the sake of one’s soul and takes nourishment for the sake of one’s body. Moreover, the blessing of prayer remains with him until the time arises for another prayer, just as the strength received from breakfast remains until one eats dinner. Even so, the soul remains troubled whenever the time of prayer is far off, by reason of whatever mundane concerns beset it, particularly if necessity calls for the company of boys, women, and evil people. For he will hear something that disturbs the serenity of his soul, such as obscene words and songs to which the soul is drawn, that he will be unable to control. But at the time of prayer, he purifies his soul of what is past and prepares it for the future. Then, too, not a week goes by in accordance with this regular arrangement without the soul and the body becoming weary. Disturbing residues accumulate over the course of the week, which he is unable to purify and cleanse away except by linking a whole day of worship with rest for the body. Thus, the body receives in full [148] on the Sabbath what it missed during the six workdays and is prepared for the future. The soul also recollects what it missed by being preoccupied with the body. It is as if it were treated and cured of a prior illness on that day and provided with whatever will ward off that illness in the future, much like what *Job* used to do every week with regard to his children, as it says: *Perhaps my children have sinned* [Job 1:5].

Then, he initiates the monthly medical treatment, which is a *time of atonement for all their generations*,<sup>12</sup> meaning, *the generations of the*

12. Daily Prayer Book, Additional Service, New Moon.

months, the new events [arising with the succession] of days, as when it says: *For you do not know what the day will bring* [Prov. 27:1]. Then, he initiates the *three pilgrimage festivals*, and then the day of the revered fast on which there is forgiveness for past sins. On that day, he will seek to redress all that he omitted during the days of the weeks and months [of the preceding year], while the soul frees itself from the evil promptings of the estimative, spirited, and appetitive [faculties] and completely turns away from helping them, whether by thought or deed.

Now even if it is not possible to repent for thinking—because thoughts associated with what took place in the past overpower the soul through the remembrance of things it heard from childhood, like poems and stories and other such things—it may nonetheless free itself with respect to actions and excuse itself for those thoughts as well. Moreover, it will undertake not to speak of them with the tongue, let alone to act them out, as it was said: *I have determined that my mouth should not transgress* [Ps. 17:3]. His fasting on that day is the kind of fasting by which he comes close to resembling the angels, because he spends it in submissiveness, obedience, standing at attention, bending the knee, giving praise, and singing exultantly. All of his bodily faculties abstain from natural concerns and concentrate on the Law, as though there were no bestial nature within him. The fast of a virtuous man, when he fasts, is also like this, namely, that seeing and hearing as well as the tongue “fast” too, so that nothing preoccupies them other than what brings one close to God, exalted be He. The same is true of the internal faculties, such as imagination, cogitation, and the others; and worthy actions will also be linked with that.

(3:6) The Khazar said: Those actions are known.

(3:7) The sage said: The governmental actions and the intellectual nomoi are the things that are known. But the divine ones, which are added to these in order to be realized within the religious community of a *living God* [Josh. 3:10] who governs it, are not known until they come from Him in an explicated and detailed manner. Indeed, even if the essential characteristics of those governmental and intellectual nomoi were known, their precise determination is not known; for we know that giving charity and sharing [150] are obligatory and

that training the soul through fasting and obedience is obligatory. Moreover, deceit is disgraceful, and promiscuous behavior with women is disgraceful too, as is having intercourse with certain relatives, whereas honoring parents and whatever else resembles that are obligatory. However, defining and determining that so that it is appropriate for everyone belongs only to God, exalted be He.<sup>13</sup> As for the divine actions, they are outside the scope of our intellects [but not] rejected by the intellect. Rather, the intellect will follow them unquestioningly, just as a person who is sick will follow the physician unquestioningly with regard to his medicines and prescriptions. Don't you see how far *circumcision* is from syllogistic reasoning and how it has no connection with governance? Still, *Abraham* submitted himself to it, despite the difficulty of the command from the standpoint of nature, when he was one hundred years old, for his own sake and for the sake of his child. It became a *sign of the covenant* so that the divine order might attach itself to him and to his progeny, as it says: *I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages to be God to you*, and so on [Gen 17:7].



(3:11) The sage said: The superior person among us respectfully heeds these divine Laws (*al-sharā'i' al-ilāhiyya*), I mean, *circumcision*, the Sabbaths and festivals and their concomitants, which are legislated by God, and also [the obligation] to be mindful of the *forbidden sexual relations*, the *mixed kinds* in relation to plants, clothes, and animals, the *seventh year* and the *jubilee year*, being on guard against *idolatry* and all that pertains to it, such as seeking knowledge of what is hidden without prophecy, the *Urim* and the *Thummim*, or *dreams*. Therefore, he will not listen to an augur, or an astrologer, or someone who casts lots, or someone who finds either good or evil omens in the flight of birds. [He will also] be on guard against *bodily discharges*, *menstruating women*, eating and touching unclean animals, and *leprosy* too. [He will also] be mindful of the blood and the fat of sacrificial animals because they are part and parcel of *the fires of the Lord* (YHVH). He respectfully complies with whatever is incumbent upon him for every transgression, be it unintentional or intentional, by [offering] a *sacrifice*, aside from

13. Cf. Maimonides *Guide* 3.26 (below, selection 15).

all that is incumbent upon him with respect to *redemption of the first born*, the *first fruits*, and the *first born* [animals], and also a *sacrifice* for every mother who gives birth within his domain, as well as the *sacrifice* and *gift offering* to purify himself of *discharges* and *leprosy*, aside from what is incumbent upon him with respect to the *first* and *second tithes*, the *poor tithe*, appearing *three times a year*, *Passover* and its concomitant requirements, which [in each case] is a *sacrifice of the Lord* incumbent on every citizen of Israel. [There is also] the *sukkah* [Lev. 23:42] and the *lulav* [Lev. 23:40] and the *shofar*, and whatever sanctified and purified implements and utensils are needed for these various *gift-offerings* and sacrifices, as well as whatever purification and sanctification he needs, and, finally, observance of *peah* and *orlah* and [fruits designated as] *qodesh hilulim* [Lev. 19:9–10, 23, 24].

In general, he will observe whatever he possibly can of the divine ordinances, so as to be truthful when he says: *I have neither transgressed nor neglected any of Your commandments* [Deut. 26:13], quite apart from the *votive offerings*, *free-will offerings*,<sup>14</sup> *sacred gifts of greeting* [Lev. 3:6 ff.], and whatever he may take upon himself with respect to *becoming a Nazirite* [Num. 6:1–21]. These things and others like them are the divine Laws, [154] and the complete fulfillment of most of them comes about through the *service of the priests* [in the Temple].

Now the governmental Laws (*al-sharā'i' al-siyāsiyya*), for example, consist of: *You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear [false witness] against your neighbor* [Exod. 20:13–16]; *Honor [your]*

*father and mother* [Exod. 20:12]; *Love your neighbor [as yourself]* [Lev. 19:18]; *You too must befriend the stranger* [Deut 10:19]; *You shall not deal deceitfully or falsely* [Lev. 19:11]; having nothing to do with *usury* and *interest* [Lev. 25:36]; striving to have *honest scales*, *honest weights*, an *honest ephah*, and an *honest hin* [Lev. 19:36]; leaving behind the *gleanings*, the *fallen fruit*, and the *corners* [of one's fields] [Lev. 19:9–10; Deut. 24:20], and whatever resembles this.

The psychic Laws (*al-sharā'i' al-nafsāniyya*) are: *I, the Lord (YHVH), am your God; You shall have no [other gods before Me]; and You shall not take [the Lord's name in vain]* (Exod. 20:2–7), with the addition of whatever has proved to be true within this Law, [for example,] that He, exalted be He, observes and is acquainted with the inner thoughts of mankind, not to mention their actions and their words; that He repays their good as well as their evil, and that *the eyes of the Lord range over the whole earth* [Zech. 4:10; 2 Chron. 16:9]. Therefore, the superior person should neither act, speak, nor think, without believing that there are eyes in his presence, which see him, observe him, reward him, punish him, and also criticize him for every deviation [from what is proper] with respect to his words as well as his deeds. Thus, he will walk and also sit down like someone afraid and ashamed, embarrassed by his activities at times; just as he will be joyful, happy, and feel good about himself, when he has done a good deed. It is as though he is acting graciously toward his Lord, when he undergoes some hardship in obeying Him.



## TREATISE FOUR

(4:13) The sage said: The difference between the adherent of a revealed Law and the adherent of philosophy is far-reaching because the adherent of a revealed Law seeks out the Lord for the sake of great benefits, quite apart from the benefit of knowing Him. But the person who devotes himself to philosophy seeks Him out only for the purpose of describing Him according to His true character, just as he seeks to describe the earth [by asserting], for example, that it is at the center of the largest sphere, but not at the center of the sphere of

the zodiac, as well as other things that are known besides this. Being ignorant about God is detrimental to him only in the way that being ignorant about the earth is to someone who has said that it is flat. The benefit, in his view, consists only in knowing things according to their true character, [thus] becoming like the Active Intellect so that he may come to be identical with it. Whether he is a true believer or a freethinker is of no concern, if he philosophizes. One of the fundamental principles of his belief is that, *[the Lord will do] nothing*

14. *Mishnah, Qinnim* 1:1.

[good] and nothing bad [Zeph. 1:12]. He also believes in the past eternity of this world; therefore, he does not think that it was ever non-existent up to the point at which it was created. On the contrary, it has not ceased [to exist in the past], and it will never cease [to exist in the future]. Moreover, God, exalted be He, is its "Creator" [only] in a metaphorical sense, not according to [254] what is understood by the expression [literally]. By "Creator" [and] "Artisan," he means only that He is its cause and ground, whereby the effect [namely, the world] has not ceased to co-exist with the cause [namely, God]. If the cause is potential, then the effect is potential; but if it is actual, then the effect is actual. Now God, exalted be He, is an actual cause. Therefore, His effect is actual as long as He is a cause of it. However, even though [the philosophers] have gone this far, they may nonetheless be excused because they were not in a position [to grasp] divine science except by way of reason, and this is what their reasoning has brought them to. Those among them who are fair-minded say to those who follow a revealed Law what Socrates said: "O people, I do not deny this divine wisdom of yours. Rather, I say that I don't comprehend it. I am wise only in human wisdom."<sup>15</sup>



(4:15) ...Now the name of YHVH<sup>16</sup> is identical with what is designated by Him as [His] "face," when it says: *My face will go [in the lead]...* [Exod. 33:14], and *If Your face does not go [in the lead]...* [Exod. 33:15]. It [was] also the object of [Moses'] request when it says: *Let YHVH go in our midst* [Exod. 34:9]. The meaning of *Elohim* may be grasped by reasoning because the intellect leads to [the conclusion] that the world has a Ruler and Source of order. People differ about it in accordance with their ways of reasoning, but the most important of the opinions about Him is that of the philosophers. As for the meaning of YHVH, it cannot be grasped by reasoning, but rather by being witnessed in that prophetic [kind of] seeing by which man is almost able to separate himself from his species and attach himself to an angelic species, so that a *different spirit* [Num. 14:24] arises within him, just as it says: *You will become another man* [1 Sam. 10:6]; *God gave him another*

*heart* [1 Sam. 10:9]; *Then the spirit seized Amasai* (1 Chron. 12:19); *The hand of YHVH came upon me* [Ezek. 37:1, 40:1]; and, *Let a vigorous spirit sustain me* [Ps. 51:14]. [These expressions] are allusions to the *holy spirit*, which enwraps the prophet at the time of [his] prophecy, the *Nazirite* [Judg. 13:7, 25], and whoever is *anointed*, whether for the *priesthood* [Exod. 40:13–16] or for the kingdom, at the time that the prophet anoints him, or at the time that God supports him and shows him the right way toward some thing, or at the time that the *priest* is inspired with knowledge of what is hidden, when he has inquired of the *Urim* and the *Thummim*. Then, the previous doubts which used to fill him with misgivings about *Elohim* will be resolved for man, and he will make light of those syllogistic arguments that are used to acquire knowledge of [His] lordship and unity. Moreover, at that time, man becomes an [exemplary] worshiper, passionately in love with the One he worships, consumed with loving Him even to the point of dying because of the great enjoyment he finds in being attached to Him [260] and the hurt and loss [he experiences] in being far from Him. [This is] in direct contrast to those who devote themselves to philosophy, who see in the worship of God [only] good manners and saying what is true with regard to exalting Him above other things that exist, just as the sun ought to be exalted above other things that are visible, and [who suppose] that there is nothing more involved in the denial of God than a [certain] baseness characteristic of the soul that is content to accept falsehood.

(4:16) The Khazar said: The difference between *Elohim* and YHVH has become clear to me, and I have also understood the difference between the *God of Abraham* and the *God of Aristotle*. One longs for YHVH, *exalted be He*, by tasting<sup>17</sup> and witnessing for oneself, while one inclines towards *Elohim* by reasoning. Moreover, that very tasting invites the one who has experienced it to be consumed with loving Him even to the point of dying and [to prefer] death [to living] without Him, whereas this very reasoning makes one see that exalting Him is obligatory as long as one is not harmed and one does not undergo hardship because of it. Therefore, Aristotle should be excused for attaching no importance to the actions

15. Cf. Plato *Apology* 20D–E.

16. Up to this moment, we have followed the Jewish practice of substituting "Lord" for "YHVH," by writing "the Lord (YHVH)." We do not do so here because Halevi has made the contrast be-

tween the God of philosophy and the God of Judaism as identified by the unprounceable name (YHVH) the theme of his discussion.

17. See the introduction to Alghazali *Deliverer* (above, selection 8).

belonging to the nomos, since he doubts whether God has any knowledge of that.

(4:17) [The sage said:] Well, [then, by that standard] it was right for *Abraham* to have undergone all that he did in *Ur of the Chaldees* [Gen. 15:7], and then in departing from [his] homeland [Gen. 12:1 [ff.], and also in [accepting] *circumcision* [Gen. 17:24], and again in expelling *Ishmael* [Gen. 21:14], and even further in [his] anxiety about slaughtering *Isaac* [Gen. 22: 1–19], since all that he experienced with respect to the divine order he experienced by savoring, not by reasoning. Moreover, he saw that nothing relating to his particular circumstances was hidden from Him. He saw too, that [God] rewarded him for his goodness moment by moment and also guided him towards His righteous paths, so that Abraham would neither go forwards nor backwards unless it was with His authorization. How, then, could he not look down upon his earlier syllogistic arguments? Thus, it was just as the *Sages, of blessed memory*, explained homiletically with regard to: *He took him outside* [Gen. 15:5] [namely,] “He said to him: Abandon your astronomy.”<sup>18</sup> It means that He ordered him to abstain from his scientific studies based on reasoning, such as astronomy and other such things, and to take upon himself the duty of obeying the One he had experienced by tasting, just as it says: *Taste and see how good YHVH is* [Ps. 34:9].

Thus, YHVH is rightly called the *God of Israel* [Exod. 5:1] because this outlook [on God] is entirely lacking among other [peoples] beside themselves. He is [likewise] called the *God of the land* (2 Kings 17:26) because it has [a special character] that belongs to its air, its soil, and its skies, which helps [to promote] that [kind of intense experience], in conjunction with those [other] factors that are like cultivation and preparation [because they are designed] to produce this kind [of individual].

Thus, everyone who follows the divine nomos is only following those endowed with this [kind of] vision. Their souls are content with accepting their traditions on faith, despite the simplicity of their speech and the coarseness of their parables, whereas they are not content with accepting the traditions of the philosophers on faith, despite the refined character of their stories, the beautiful organization of their compositions, and whatever flashes forth because of them with respect to demonstration. Yet, the multitudes do not [262] follow

them, as if the truth had already been revealed to people's souls, just as it is said, “Words of truth are recognized.”<sup>19</sup>

(4:18) The Khazar said: I see that you are attacking the philosophers and ascribing to them the very opposite of what is generally known about them, so that someone who has withdrawn from society and practiced asceticism is said to have devoted himself to philosophy and also to have adopted the viewpoint of the philosophers. Yet you are robbing them of every worthy action.

(4:19) The sage said: Not at all. What I said is the very foundation of their belief that the ultimate happiness available to man consists only in [having] theoretical knowledge and obtaining a grasp of the existents as things that are intelligible by means of the potential intellect, [which] then becomes an actual intellect, and then an acquired intellect, approaching the Active Intellect, so that one does not fear extinction. Now this can be completed only by spending one's lifetime in investigation and continuous reflection. It cannot be completed simultaneously with [having] worldly preoccupations. That is why they thought ascetic renunciation was the proper course of action with regard to wealth, honor, pleasure, and children, so that these things would not distract one from [the pursuit of] knowledge. But, then, when man becomes cognizant of that end which is desired from knowledge, he is not concerned about what he does; for, in fact, [the philosophers] are not concerned about receiving a reward for that God-fearing behavior [they display], nor do they think that if they were to steal forbidden property or to commit murder that they would be punished [hereafter] for it. However, they have commanded what is good and forbidden what is reprehensible in the most appropriate and most excellent way, and [they have also commanded people] to imitate the Creator, who has established things in the best way. Accordingly, they produced the nomoi, namely, rules of political governance [which are] not legally binding, but to which exceptions can be made, unless there is some [overriding] necessity [not to make exceptions]. However, the Law is not like that except in its governmental parts, [and] it has already been explained in jurisprudence what is subject to exception and what is not subject to it.



18. *Babylonian Talmud*, Shabbat 156a; Nedarim 32b. Cf. Maimonides *Letter on Astrology* (below, selection 17).

19. *Babylonian Talmud*, Sotah 9b.